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Special Release

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OBITUARY

EMERITUS PROFESSOR JOHN OWEN HUNWICK (06 January, 1936 - 01 April, 2015)

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor I. F. Adewole, FAS, announces, with deep regret, the transition of Professor John Owen Hunwick, a distinguished Emeritus Professor of African History and the Religion of Islam, whose sad event occurred on Wednesday, 01 April, 2015 in Skokie, Evanston, United States of America.

He was born on 06 January, 1936 in Chard, Somerset, England to Rev. Cyril Owen Hunwick, a Methodist Minister and his wife (whom he married in 1929), Doris Louise Miller. He started school early in 1938 at Horsham, Sussex, and in 1946 he entered Grammar School at Bridport, Dorset, where he began to learn French and Latin. In 1950, he was sent to Kent College, a Methodist boarding school in Canterbury. After serving in the military, he volunteered for the Somaliland Scouts, a Brigade in the British Army, which sparked his passion for Africa and its people. Professor Hunwick attended the University of London where he bagged a B.A. Degree in Arabic with First Class Honours in 1959 and obtained his Ph.D degree in Islamic Studies from the same University in 1974.

Late Professor Hunwick was a pioneer scholar of African history and the religion of Islam in Africa. At a time when Western scholars had the notion that Africa had no history or any civilization, he was one of those who stood by the continent and argued that "there's a lot more to Africa than song and dance". He started his academic career as a teacher of English at Ahfad University for Boys, Omdurman, Sudan between 1959 and 1960, before he joined the services of the University of Ibadan. In 1960, Professor Hunwick began teaching Arabic in the Department of History, University of Ibadan, Nigeria (then called University College, a branch of the University of London) and later in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, which he, in conjunction with Dr B. G. Martins, established in 1962. He served as the Acting Head of the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies between 1964 and 1967. He also founded the Centre for Arabic Documentation in the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan for the preservation of Arabic Manuscripts, and served as the Honorary Secretary to the Centre from its inception in 1963 to 1967. He was the pioneer Editor of the *Mujallatul-Buhūth (Research Bulletin)* of the Centre since July, 1964. He was a Lecturer in Arabic at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London between 1967 and 1969. He was Associate Professor,

Department of History, University of Ghana between 1969 and 1975; and later, Professor and Chair, in the Department of History in the same University between 1975 and 1977.

In the 1970s, Professor Hunwick visited Timbuktu as part of a UNESCO delegation that established the Ahmad Baba Center. He remained engaged with Timbuktu's manuscript libraries over the ensuing decades, cataloguing portions of collections and publishing translations of important texts. His startling and monumental discovery in Timbuktu in 1999 included 3,000 Arabic manuscripts.

In 1981, Professor Hunwick took up an appointment at Northwestern University. There, he founded the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA) and served as its pioneer Director. He was, till his death, Emeritus Professor of History and Religion in the University, having retired in 2004 after 23 years of service. He was credited with turning Northwestern into a preeminent centre for the study of Islamic Africa. Among his many achievements and honours, Professor Hunwick was appointed as the Director of the Programme of African Studies in Northwestern. He was a fellow of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences and received the African Studies Association's Distinguished Africanist Award in 2005. He was known as a generous scholar and mentor, whose passionate interest in Arabic manuscripts from sub-Saharan Africa and pioneering research into West Africa's Islamic intellectual traditions inspired and shaped the careers of students and scholars worldwide. He was an author of numerous publications on Islam, African history and civilization including "*Shari'a* in Songhay". He was the founder-editor of *Sudanic Africa: a Journal of Historical Sources*.

Late Professor John Owen Hunwick was the 14th Exchange Lecturer of the Academic Link Series of the University of Ibadan held on 26 March, 2008. He was survived by his wife, Uwa, two sons, Joseph and David, and three daughters, Maryam, Yvette and Annie. He was buried on Tuesday, 7 April, 2015 at the age of 78.

He will be missed by his family, friends, students and colleagues. May his gentle soul rest in perfect peace. Amen.

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